

GSDC HOLDS NO-TILL TIFEAGLE EDUCATION SEMINAR

TIFTON, GA – At the request of the TifEagle Growers Association, the Georgia Seed Development Commission organized a day-long educational seminar to explore both the viability of TifEagle Bermudagrass as a no-till variety and the mechanics involved with the no-till (no-dig, minimum-till) renovation process. GSDC is the state agency responsible for the licensing and marketing of TifEagle.

UGA professor and TifEagle breeder Dr. Wayne Hanna hosted the seminar, which was held at the Rural Development Center in Tifton Georgia. In his opening remarks, Dr. Hanna admitted to being an early skeptic of no-till. “I’ve got to be honest. Six years ago, I stood up right here in Tifton and said that I had serious reservations about no-till. I was worried that after a year or two you’d start to see a lot of problems on no-tilled greens, especially with off-types and possibly ‘black layer’ on greens with poor drainage. I was wrong.”

Guest panel member Pat O’Brien, Southeastern Director of the USGA Green Section, agreed. “I’ve examined hundreds of renovated no-till greens over the last six years and I’ve yet to come across a failure. Folks, no-till works, and it works well!” Mr. O’Brien went into considerable detail comparing the benefits of no-till versus conventional reconstruction. Clubs can expect to reduce their costs downward from \$1.50 to \$2.00 per square foot (and from \$4.00 per square foot for full scale renovations) to only 45 to 50 cents for no-till. Down time is also a big practical and financial factor. O’Brien, who travels the region extensively, feels that over the next several years most bentgrass courses will be converting to the ultradwarf bermudagrass varieties. “Low-to-mid budget courses are already on the ultradwarf bandwagon, and the high-end private clubs are next,” he told attendees. “Superintendents who still have Tifdwarf or 328 are also aching to upgrade. Why drive a sedan when you can get behind the wheel of a sports car? With no-till, cost simply isn’t a major drawback anymore.”

Dr. Bob Carrow, noted researcher and professor of turfgrass science with the University of Georgia, outlined some “common sense” site assessment practices for the group. He stressed how physical, chemical and biological soil conditions affect golf course greens. “If you find problems in these areas on older greens, unless corrective action is taken those same problems are going to persist and probably get worse. Minor organic matter buildup can usually be dealt with after you no-till, but no-till is by no means a magic bullet for most problems. Be wary of excessive organic matter buildup, as well as inadequate organic matter content. Look for contouring problems, poor drainage, water-logging, standing water, dry spots, soft spots, layering, diseases, pests (especially nematodes), poor air movement, excessive wear, shade issues and high salt accumulations, especially in the root zone.” Visual observation, and in many cases, field and lab tests will be a must.

Dr. Earl Elsner, consulting agronomist and former GSDC director, finished up the program with a compelling argument for a strong set of no-till standards. His recommendations, which the group embraced, were: (a) adoption of uniform 'greens inspection and grading protocols (b) test for nematodes in all TifEagle production fields, with corrective action if necessary (c) mill sprigs to remove soil, thatch and large clumps to provide uniform planting material (d) use vacuum-packed temperature-controlled sprig containers to ensure sprig quality and freshness (e) follow-up inspection visits to all no-till projects to determine that all renovated greens are on-track to produce high quality putting surfaces, or what corrective action might be necessary.

In closing the program, GSDC Director Dr. Mike Garland summed up his view of the current no-till situation. "Several of our TifEagle growers have already had successful no-till renovation projects, but let's take our hats off to the Champion folks. They might not have pioneered the process, but they certainly have turned it into a mainstream option. We've got some catching up to do. I'm very optimistic though, because based on the enthusiasm of the TifEagle growers here today, we're not only going to compete, we're going to set the bar for our no-till standards even higher. TifEagle is an excellent variety. That's why you'll find it at the overwhelming majority of clubs and courses where ultradwarfs have been an option. At last count, TifEagle was the grass of choice at more than 600 facilities. Ladies and gentlemen, that's over 10,000 TifEagle greens, including many PGA venues like Doral, Arnold Palmer's Bay Hill and the Champion Course in Palm Beach Gardens FL, new home of the Honda Classic. The fact that TifEagle is also an excellent candidate for no-till will give many more courses an opportunity to experience the benefits of TifEagle for themselves."

For more information and updates on the no-till TifEagle program contact

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